



Inside Congress

by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

For the week ending March 8, 2002

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

CUBA TO BUY \$3.5 MILLION IN WASHINGTON STATE APPLES, PEAS

The Cuban Interest Section sent me a letter Wednesday night expressing the intent to purchase 1,000 metric tons of apples and 20,000 metric tons of dry peas from Washington State producers. This would be the first such sale since the imposition of an embargo that has lasted 40 years.

This sale gives three million more reasons why we need to improve our commercial relations with Cuba. Our struggling state economy needs new market opportunities, and this sale shows that lifting embargoes can provide a tangible benefit to our agriculture producers

I sponsored the Trade Sanctions Reform Act, signed into law in October 2000, which lifted unilateral food and medicine sanctions on Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea and Sudan. After an extensive consultative process, final regulations permitting sales were approved in July 2001. Initial sales to Cuba occurred in December 2001, with total announced purchases amounting to \$77 million.

Consultations on price, quality, and delivery dates with Cuban import agency, Alimport, are underway. Extra fancy red delicious apples are presently priced at 28 cents a pound, so a 1,000 ton sale would be valued at more than \$500,000. Dry peas are priced around 7 cents per pound, and 20,000 metric tons would be worth about \$3 million.

I am currently circulating a letter to fellow House members to encourage Farm Bill conferees to include language that would give U.S. farmers the opportunity to use traditional financing tools in trade with Cuba. These restrictions on private financing should be eliminated to give our farmers a level playing field and full access to this new market. I've been working on this issue for many years, and I am very proud of this progress. I think this is just the beginning when it comes to selling Washington's quality agriculture products to Cuba.

RESULTS OF ANTHRAX VACCINE STUDY ARE IN

This week the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences delivered a report on the safety and efficacy of the anthrax vaccine used by the U.S. military. This report was authored pursuant to a requirement I inserted into the Fiscal Year 2000 Defense Appropriations Act, out of concern that the Department of Defense had not adequately studied the vaccine. After two years of study the IOM released its comprehensive review of the vaccine. Consultants had contacted me with concerns about mandatory anthrax vaccination, and I felt their questions needed to be answered.

A summary of the report can be found at:

[http://www.iom.edu/iom/iomhome.nsf/WFiles/Anthrax-4-pagerFINAL/\\$file/Anthrax-4-pagerFINAL.pdf](http://www.iom.edu/iom/iomhome.nsf/WFiles/Anthrax-4-pagerFINAL/$file/Anthrax-4-pagerFINAL.pdf)

PROTECTING RESEARCHERS FROM TERRORISM

At a hearing this week with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) I raised the issue of the easy accessibility over the Internet of certain filings at the Department of Agriculture by researchers. I am concerned that terrorist organizations such as the Animal and Earth Liberation Front might use the information in these filings to target scientists or facilities, as happened a year ago with the firebombing of the UW Urban Horticulture Center. I was pleased that the Secretary of Agriculture agreed to remove sensitive information from the Department's website until legal counsel has had an opportunity to review my security concerns and ensure that we are not jeopardizing the security of our research community.

GRANT TO SPOKANE CC WILL HELP READY STUDENTS FOR BIOTECH JOBS

Spokane Community College will receive a \$573,448 grant from the Department of Education to establish a biotechnology high school at its downtown campus in partnership with three local school districts and local biotechnology businesses. Students will have integrated learning opportunities at this school to get dual high school and college credit in regular subjects while still getting work-based learning opportunities. In addition to earning college credit toward a two-year degree in biotechnology or other science, students who complete the program will be awarded an industry-validated certificate as a biotechnology technician, a high-wage, high-demand job in the Spokane region. This grant will be used to assist with start-up costs of the school. This project is a fine example of how education and business can partner together to bring economic development opportunities to our state, while making sure our children have the skills they need to be successful in their careers.

LEGISLATION

This week I became a cosponsor of **H.R. 3900**, a bill that helps restore the \$4.4 billion transportation funding shortfall in this year's proposed budget. The bill, introduced by Rep. Bill Young of Florida, would help keep \$100 million in Washington state for transportation spending. The decrease in this year's budget is due to a shortfall in federal gas tax receipts.

The Paul Coverdell Medical Research Investment Act (**H.R. 744**) is another bill I became a cosponsor of this week. Introduced by Rep. Jennifer Dunn of Washington, this tax legislation would promote charitable giving to medical research. Under the measure, people may contribute stock options directly to medical research without first having it figured into their income or alternative minimum tax. For example, those wanting to contribute their stock options to medical research no longer will have to sell \$140 worth of stock to make a \$100 donation. The bill also raises the cap on how much one may contribute to medical research before losing the tax deduction. The cap will go from 50% to 80% of total income of the additional amount if for medical research. Over five years, this bill is expected to inspire over \$1 billion dollars in additional medical research.

I became a cosponsor of **H.R. 2341**, the Class Action Fairness Act of 2001, sponsored by Rep. Bob Goodlatte of Virginia. This bill provides additional protections for consumers on whose behalf class action lawsuits are brought. The legislation would give greater flexibility for suits to be heard in federal court when plaintiffs are from many states, while still ensuring that purely local or intrastate issues remain in state court. This bill also requires that class action notices be written in "plain English" so that consumers can understand the purpose of the class action and their legal rights. It would prohibit settlements in which class members actually lose money in order to pay attorneys' fees in a successful class action suit. Finally, it eliminates the prohibition of awards to class members based on geography and the payment of bounties.

I also agreed to become a cosponsor of **H.R. 1265**, introduced by Rep. Earl Blumenauer of Oregon. This legislation adds bicycling to the existing transportation fringe benefit provision in the tax code allowing employers to offer a benefit for alternative modes of commuting. We can reduce traffic congestion in cities by encouraging bicycling, which this bill does.

ON THE FLOOR

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week:

H.R. 3090 - Job Creation and Worker Assistance Act of 2002. The bill passed by a vote of 417-3. I voted yes. This bill gives businesses incentives to create more jobs. The job creation business provisions included an additional 30 percent expensing of the

value of certain capital assets and conforms Alternative Minimum Tax depreciation for property eligible for this special depreciation. The bill also provides a 5-year carryback of net operating losses and waives the AMT 90% limitation on the allowance of losses. Finally, the bill extends a number of tax incentives that were due to expire, in effect, holding off a tax increase. To help those who need immediate assistance, this bill contains thirteen additional weeks of unemployment benefits with a possible further extension if unemployment increases, for those who have exhausted their benefits.

S.J.Res. 32 - Congratulating the United States Military Academy at West Point on its Bicentennial Anniversary. The bill passed by a vote of 407-1. I voted yes.

This bill congratulates West Point on its bicentennial anniversary and recognizes it as an outstanding leadership development institution that upholds and promotes the highest virtues of American society. The resolution also commends those who have led and taught at the Academy for inculcating its 58,000 graduates with moral, ethical and intellectual values and skills that are the foundations for the dedicated service so honorably given by those graduates to the Army, the Nation and friends of freedom and liberty around the world for 200 years.

S. 1857 - Encouraging the Negotiated Settlement of Tribal Claims.

The bill passed by a voice vote. I voted yes. This bill says that reconciliation reports received by an Indian tribe in response to requirements under the American Indian Trust Fund Management Reform Act of 1994 shall be considered to have been received on December 31, 1999, for purposes of applying a statute of limitations in order: (1) to provide report recipients with the opportunity to postpone the filing of claims; (2) to facilitate the voluntary dismissal of claims; and (3) to encourage settlement negotiations with the United States.

SCHEDULE

I met with Lockheed Martin's CEO, Dr. Vance Coffman. I met with LeRoy Allison, president of Washington State Association of Counties about the Department of Energy and the Payments In Lieu of Taxes program. I met with Eileen B. Mason, acting Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts about appropriations. I met with Tom O'Brien of Colville about employment and training programs. I met with USDA's Undersecretary of Food Safety, Dr. Elsa Murano about biosecurity and food safety.

I met with representatives from the Washington State Department of Health, including Kris Sparks, director of the Office of Community and Rural Health, Charlotte Hardt, Area Health Education Center at WSU-Spokane, Nancy Vorhees, Inland Northwest Health Services, Tom Martin, CEO of Lincoln Hospital, and Gordon McLean, CEO of Mt. Carmel Hospital, about rural health care delivery concerns. I met with James Waddell, deputy district engineer for project management for the Walla Walla district of the Corps of Engineers regarding 5th district projects and the Corps' budget.

Vaughn Baker, superintendent at Lake Roosevelt, gave me an update on what's been happening there. WSU Deans Jim Zuiches and Dr. Michael Tate, along with Dr. Sandra Ristow, associate director of the Ag Research Center, and Randy Smith and Deborah Moore from the ag community, came to discuss their ag budget priorities for the coming year with me.

Secretary of the Navy Gordon England, Adm. Vernon Clark, chief of Naval Operations, and Gen. James L. Jones, Marine Corps Commandant testified about the Navy's budget needs for the upcoming year at the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee of which I am vice chairman. Marketing and regulatory programs were the subject of an Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee hearing I attended. I was able to raise questions about alternative ways to fund the National Endowment for the Arts at the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee. I heard testimony from engineers at the Science Committee this week about the reasons why the World Trade Center towers collapsed on Sept. 11. I met with Nanette Walkley and others with the Washington Ag and Forestry Leadership Program about renewable energy sources. Gary Burdette and his guide dog, Jabar, met with me at my office to discuss issues important to him and the Washington Council of the Blind, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, pedestrian safety, and public transportation. Gary Pearson, Skip Dreps, Pat Farrell and Chuck Karczewski of the Paralyzed Veterans of America met with me about Veterans Administration health care issues.

The Washington State Forest Protection Association came to discuss a landmark fish and forest report. I met with members of the Washington Council of Police and Sheriffs, including Sgt. Mike Amos and Deputy Joe Lusignan of Benton County, and Cheney Police Department Officer Kelly Hembach.

The Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee took up food, nutrition and consumer services issues. With the Interior Subcommittee, I reviewed U.S. Geological Survey funding. Julie Fridley of East Valley High School, a Presidential Classroom Student, met me at my office. I met with EPA Administrator Christie Whitman and other Western Caucus members about EPA priorities for 2002. I met with Michael Kessler about funding for the Young Marines program. Carolyn Clark of the Washington Small Business Development Center met with me to discuss small business issues. Stevens County Commissioner Vickie Strong, Barry Lamont of Northeastern Washington Rural Resources, Terri Owens of Rural Resources, Bev Wilkerson with Head Start Teachers, and Emergency Housing Coordinator Robert Maher met with me about a community services block grant. I spoke with Brig. Gen. David Fastabend with the Corps of Engineers regarding Lyons Ferry Marina. I also spoke with John Iani, Regional Director of the EPA, regarding issues of importance to Eastern Washington. I enjoyed meeting with P.J. Grabicki, Larry Stuckart and Nancy Isserlis about housing for the needy and other important community needs.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

Spokane Office

920 W. Riverside, Suite 594
Spokane, WA 99201
509-353-2374
Fax: 509-353-2412

Spokane Valley Office

9209 E. Mission Avenue, Suite B
Spokane, WA 99206
509-924-7775
Fax: 509-924-7671

Colville Office

555 S. Main Street
Colville, WA 99114
509-684-3481
Fax: 509-684-3482

Walla Walla Office

29 S. Palouse Street
Walla Walla, WA 99362
509-529-9358
Fax: 509-529-9379

Washington, D.C. Office

223 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-224-2006
Fax: 202-225-3392

Website

www.house.gov/nethercutt

Electronic Mail

www.house.gov/nethercutt/contact